

City of San Antonio **DESIGN ENHANCEMENTS**

*A Quarterly
Report of
the City
Architect's
Office*

PROJECT NEWS



Edgewood School District students with visual arts teacher Deborah Keller and Mission Trails Project landscape architect Larry Clark, posing next to the conceptual model of the Mission Trails Project the group built for the June 20, 1998, ground breaking ceremony. The temporal installation illustrated the different components of the project, and was displayed on the grounds of Mission Espada.

The Mission Trails Project is a \$32 million transportation enhancement project receiving \$14.1 million in funding through the Intermodal Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and \$3.6 million from the City of San Antonio to enhance the transportation linkages among the missions, making it easier and more pleasant to travel from one mission to the other. It signals the latest in a 60-year effort to give the missions the status they deserve locally, regionally and nationwide. It is a ten mile corridor linking the missions, one to another, using four transportation elements: a Scenic Route that generally follows the San Antonio River; a Dry Route that is unaffected by flooding; hike and bike trails; and an excellent system of signage, graphics, and four sites designated for public artworks.

The four public art sites selected and approved by the Mission Trails Oversight Committee are: the Intersection of **Durango and South Alamo** (site 1), the intersection of **Grove and Roosevelt** (site 2), the intersection of **SE**

Military Drive and Padre (site 3) and **South of Mission Espada at Camino Coahuilteca** (site 4).

On August 26, 1997, the Mission Trails Artist Selection Panel representing the community, City Staff, Texas Department of Transportation, and the project consultants met to interview twelve artists that were short-listed from among 113 submittals. Following the interviews, the panel recommended **Jud Fine** for site 1, **Clark Wiegman** for site 2, **Stacy Levy** for site 3 and **Michael Davis** for site 4. The Mission Trails Oversight Committee accepted the panel's recommendations, and on November 14, 1998, City Council approved the selection.

The artists are currently working on the final design of their concepts after three rounds of community meetings, and reviews of preliminary concepts. Presentations of the final designs are scheduled for early October, 1998. The designs will be featured in the next issue of **DESIGN ENHANCEMENTS**. FP

SPECIAL THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING MISSION TRAILS ARTIST SELECTION PANEL MEMBERS FOR THEIR SUPPORT, PATIENCE AND INTEREST:

Janie Garza- Mission Espada Neighborhood;
Deborah Keller- Roosevelt Park Neighborhood;
Margaret Madrid- Son Jose Neighborhood; **Michael Casey**- Southtown/ King William Neighborhood; **Jorge Pardo**- Public Art Expert; **Loyce Ince**- Conservation Society; **Ramon Vasquez y Sanchez**- Chairman of the Public Art Advisory Committee; **Larry Clark**- Project Architect; **John German**- Director of Public Works; **Scott Stover**- Parks and Recreation Project Manager; **Terry Williams**- SMWBA; **David Valli**- TxDOT engineer.

CALENDAR 1998

September 1- October 30th- A photographic installation by Mexican photographer David Silvan at the International Center, 208 South St. Mary's and in conjunction with **Fotoseptiembre 1998**. Mon. - Fri. 10 am -5 p.m.

November 14- Dec. 12- Blue Star on Fredricksburg Road. Arts and businesses working together to help promote the Deco District and San Antonio revitalization efforts.

PUBLIC STREET

From Cloth to Clay

Tiles for a Public Art Project

By Marcia Goren Weser

To come full circle, to return to a starting point that is, at once, fresh and new, yet familiar and true, is to know the essential paradox of living. For Ann Adams, who began her career as a studio potter and later evolved into textile design and quilting, it has been a circuitous route back. In early 1997 she was commissioned by the City of San Antonio to design and install ceramic tiles as elements of an architectural structure that will stand at the heart of the city, part of an ambitious public art project scheduled for completion by December 1998.

The site is the Convention Center Plaza Street Car Station, on the east and west sides of Alamo Street, just south of Commerce. It is the busiest pedestrian intersection in the city, at the heart of the central business district and adjacent to the Convention Center Complex, major hotels, dining and shopping areas. Adams' series of tiles will adorn the four sides of each of the columns supporting canopies over these VIA Transportation stops. Portions of the charming San Antonio Riverwalk are just below the street level of one station, where her spiral floor design leads, literally steps away.

"It is interesting that I am working with clay again. It was my major course of study in college," Adams said. "When I lived in Oklahoma, I had a kiln, making cone 9 stoneware...my own glazes. I made my first quilt later, just for a change of pace, and felt freer." Adams was a studio potter until 1986, following the lead of her grandfather, a prominent architect in Oklahoma City whose hobby was pottery.

"I supposed some of my choices were dependent on what I perceived as family approval: it was all right to be a potter but quilting was too 'Okie'," she recalls. "It was crafty, which plays into the ongoing controversy about [fine] art versus craft. It feels as if I've come full circle now, back to my family roots, to an architectural aspect of my work—so grandpa could appreciate the design part of my work."

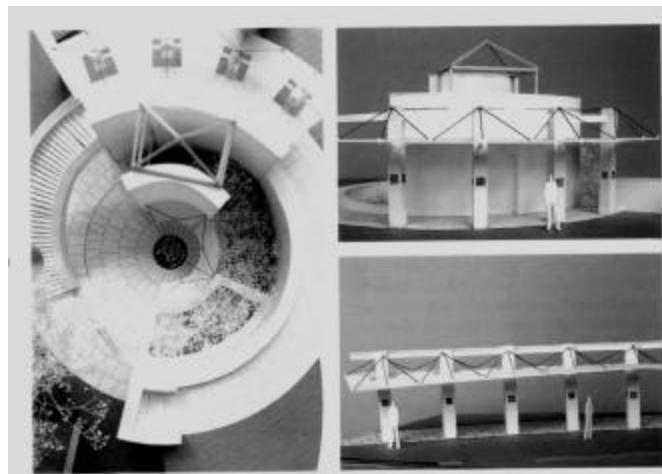
Her quilts and textile work has been recognized by

inclusion in many exhibits, including *Quilt National*. Her Flat, graphic compositions use strong colors, rhythmic patterning and repetition of line and shape to create symmetrical designs. Painted surface designs and volume defined by quilting read as texture, introducing additional elements to these works.

Indeed, it was through slides of some of these quilts, part of the City of San Antonio artists' slide registry, that her work came to be selected. Felix Padrón, design enhancement coordinator with the City Architect's Office in Public Works, chose several artists' slides from the registry. Their review by Beaty Saunders Architects for this project was based on discussions about concepts for the space.

"I saw the patterning in Ann's work and related to that....she was one of the several artists whose work I thought might work well with what Mike Beaty wanted to do," Padrón explained. "I did not know that she had a ceramics background." Architect Beaty had not been familiar with Adams' work before reviewing her preliminary slides. "I was in the process of designing the station when I saw her textile slides and didn't know that she had done ceramics too," Beaty said. "I was immediately struck by the work, by her use of color which said 'San Antonio' to me in the coming together of formal and informal elements. In her proposal she transformed conceptual work into hard tiles."

Three artists had been selected to present proposals. Adams met with Padrón and Beaty to review the plans and then was given one week to complete a proposal. Working night and day, she returned with not only a written proposal and budget but also a maquette of the site



showing her tiled columns and an actual 14-inch square

ceramic tile as an example of how she would proceed. "My sample was still warm because I had completed the grouting only that morning," Adams said.

After being selected, she had to win design approval by San Antonio's Historic and Design Review Commission. Later, because budget constraints, she was limited to 44 tiles (down from the original 52) on columns under the canopy on both sides of the street and a six-foot diameter circular floor design. Her basic motif is a circle within a square.

"I combine sensitivity to Mexican folk art traditions with motifs found in the nearby Spanish missions, such as the rose window," Adams explained. "I use some of my favorite quilting techniques, African-American designs, and improvisations which are intuitive. It is very suitable for San Antonio because of the Latino folk influence....some of what people call naïve or primitive art is actually very sophisticated.

"It is fun to use techniques from fabric on clay, such as printing 'blocks or layers' of slip combed through the clay for texture [like fabric painting]. The clay shapes are cut and arranged and rearranged like piecework, working with color and shape; then there is the addition of line and dots and stripes to create detail; the square and the semicircle are then enclosed by a larger square, and then a border is placed around that. It is an uncommon design, yet it could appeal to anyone."

Adams work with a 14-inch square jig for each tile, so that all are uniform and can fit precisely into the



engineered columns. She rolls out her clay on sheetrock with a large rolling pin and uses various tools to texture, cut and incise the surface of the clay. She uses an electric kiln for this low fire clay, which allows her to reglaze and refire

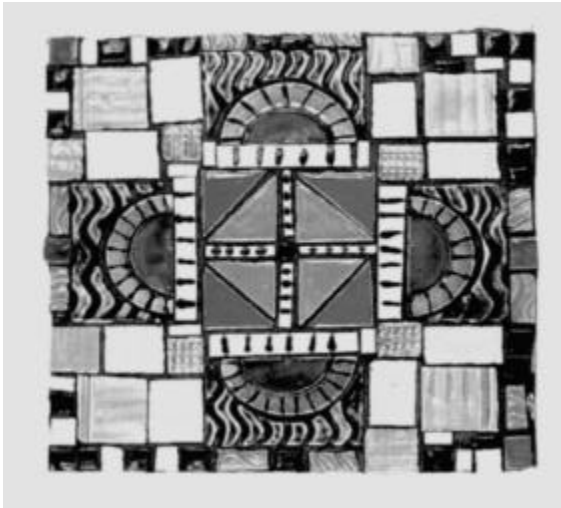
any number of times so that she can get the exact color that she desires.

She had completed six tiles by early February 1998, using store-bought glazes to achieve the high-intensity, saturated colors that have become her palette. Prior to completing the tiles, she did a full exploration of test tiles, adding layers of glaze to subsequent firings in order to determine how colors interacted. "There is still an element of surprise at the outcome...but it is now more predictable in color," she exclaimed. "It is so much fun to use these bright colors! I feel a little guilty having so much fun because it is so easy just to pour them from a bottle."

The 14-inch tiles will be placed at eye level on each of the four sides of a 24-inch wide column of neutral, creamy beige Texas limestone. The spiraling, circular design on the floor is related to the tiles in terms of color and design. The faceted tile allows it to be both durable and interesting.

Adams' commission was funded under a city ordinance passed in July 1996, mandating the use of 1% of construction costs contracted by the city to be used for public art. Various mediums are being used for 25 art projects around the city in relation to a renovation of the convention center, city parks, the Spanish Mission trails, the Airport and other sites, to be completed by the end of 1999. After voting recently to rescind the 1996 ordinance, the City Council adopted a "Design Enhancement Policy" which gives the City the precedence to explore the possibilities of adding, with public input and approval, art components to city projects. There is, however, no fixed percentage and no mandate to do so.

"I see the new policy as an opportunity," said Padrón, "to educate the community on the importance and role of art in our build environment....with the policy community teams may be established for each eligible project to help determine who will execute the enhancement component....how much of an allowance they may want to create, including gathering additional funds or in-kind support for their projects too....the community may get even more for its dollars... I think San Antonio will see a very different landscape by the year 2000."



Mike Beaty sees additional benefits: "The site is an exercise in minimalism...it forms an edge on a plaza but doesn't create a visual 'wall' because you can see beyond the edge...it defines the plaza with a serpentine walk through it. And of course Ann's tiles make the columns more interesting...it's like walking through an outdoor art gallery. The wonderful thing about this project is the way it evolved. It was the ideal situation: I got to be in on the choosing of the artist, and the artist got to impact on the evolution of the project. It was truly the integration of two disciplines, a welding of art and architecture, and reflective of the fine skills necessary to craft public spaces and buildings."

As artists design for the world, moving from personal concerns and intimate spaces into larger, often impersonal arenas, they can serve as catalysts for aesthetic concerns in a community. The common perception that art is a thing apart, isolated from everyday life and activities, seen only as separated object, must change if we are to have lively, life-enhancing public spaces built on a human scale. Ann Adams has translated her talent for textiles, with its traditional emphasis on the intimacy of adornment and protection, into another medium, with design that is relevant to urban spaces.

This article was previously published in *Surface Design Journal* 1998 summer issue. Marcia Goren Weser lives in San Antonio, Texas and is an independent writer, critic and curator.

RESOURCES

How can I apply and be considered for future design enhancement opportunities?

The Design Enhancement Program currently maintains an Artist Registry with over 250 individual artists on file, including slides of their work. The registry is the number one resource used for these opportunities. The registry is free and open to consultants in the design field. Call the City Architect's Office for a form and application at 210-207-4433.

How can I part of the Community PRIDE Team?

Although City Council is responsible for establishing the teams, you may start by filling out the PRIDE team application which can be obtained by calling 207-4433. The application will be on file to assist Council on making their selection.

How can I learn more about design enhancements?

The Design Enhancement Program has material on file from other cities which could be viewed by appointment. Citizens and Civic Organizations can also contact the Program to schedule a slide show for their group. The presentation provides an overview of the wide range of approaches to design enhancements.

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DESIGN ENHANCEMENTS



DESIGN ENHANCEMENTS is published by the Department of Public Works City Architect's Office and is distributed to all professionals in the field of design, and community and civic groups to foster collaboration and design enhancements for public spaces that promotes economic development and neighborhood revitalization in San Antonio. Send questions, comments or ideas to **DESIGN ENHANCEMENTS**, Public Works; City Architect's Office, P. O. Box 839966, San Antonio, Texas 78283-3966. Call (210) 207-4433 Fax (210) 207-4418.

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